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THE WATCHERS

BY MARJORIE MEEKER

The old, stern years stand spectral, row by row,
The gray, grave years, the years that used to know
My waiting heart and anxious, eager eyes,
Asking forever the unanswering skies
For strange delights and dreams and breathless fears,
And finding still the same unchanging years.

The old years watch—And do they disapprove
Of this young, radiant year I live and love?
Must not their sober, withdrawn majesty
Thrill to the leaping, lifting song in me,
Even their awful melancholy bless
The rush of such a swift, white happiness?—

A little while to love, to laugh, to plan
All of the joy that comes to any man,
A little while to say, "Heaven is this,"
And stop the saying with a wondering kiss,
And watch the day grow dim, the rose-leaf fall,
The strong tide ebb, and never grieve at all—

It is not much, for all the griefs and tears
Of all your days, O old, harsh, useless years!
And yet, for such a precious offering,
What prayer, what praise, what pity I would bring,
What votive incense raise at your chill shrine,
What penance will, what fiery pledge assign!

O still, strange years! Does your gray peace proclaim
That this, this too, will end and be the same?

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A space the flame must burn, the altar keep
Its happy wreaths, before the warm love sleep
Never to wake . . . Then through the blinding tears
What shall we know, what care for any years?